

Abroad

Moscow

Coming Gas

Siberian natural gas will start flowing to Western Europe next January through 2,780 miles of pipe laid from Urengoy to the Czech border, according to energy officials here, even though not a single pumping station has yet been finished. Boris Shcherbina, minister of energy construction, belittled the efficacy of American attempts to embargo Western technology for the pipeline, especially turbines for the pumping-station compressors. There has, however, been some obvious delay. As of now, only one Italian-built station and two Soviet-equipped ones are close to functional, he said, adding that back-up compressors on parallel pipelines would be used to bring the gas to Western buyers. As for the fear, expressed widely in the West, that dependence on Siberian gas might lead to undesirable political pressures, Shcherbina remarked that it represented less than 5 per cent of Western European energy requirements. "Anyway," he said, "we always fulfill our contracts." Since Western Europe now has an abundance of energy supplies, the Soviets should have plenty of time to get the wrinkles out of the system.

Tokyo

Facing Women

The position of women in the Japanese work force is still far short of equality with men. Attempts to improve it are meeting traditional opposition. The Japanese government did sign a United Nations convention on women's rights in 1979 (although the Diet has yet to approve it) that gives women the right to economic equality, and this idea has now to be faced. The government is preparing legislation that would greatly improve women's status as employees. This move has been opposed by the Nikkeiren, the employers' confederation, the feeling being that nothing should be done to disturb the balance of the existing labor market and the employment practices that derive from it. Almost half of Japanese women work outside the home, mostly in traditional jobs (nurses, clerks), and many of them have university degrees. But present law restricts women in many ways—working hours, for instance (they may not work after 10 P.M.). Then there is the important practice of reserving many industrial jobs for men. Big discrepancies in pay and retirement benefits are another long-standing issue. The employers' view is that women workers are the "flexible" part of the work force because the large majority marry relatively early and drop out to raise families.

Canberra

Riches under the Ice

Antarctica is the world's last untouched landmass, and it is known to be exceedingly rich in coal, iron, copper, and uranium, with enormous reserves of oil beneath its continental shelf. A treaty dating from 1959 has ruled out mineral exploitation and military development, and restricted the continent to scientific exploration. Recently 16 countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, have been talking here about the next steps to be taken, when the treaty expires in 1991. Already, voracious Russian factory fishing ships have been nibbling at the edges, and some other scientific bases

have been described as screens for military activity. Specific talks about the mineral exploitation of Antarctica will begin next year. Not that any useful drilling or mining could begin at the wave of a diplomatic wand. Photographs of penguins and seals have brought Antarctica home to the public, but it is still a forbidding place. Only 1 per cent of its area is exposed rock. The rest is covered by ice varying in depth from a few yards to three miles. The temperature frequently falls to minus sixty centigrade, and the winds are as strong as anywhere on the globe. So mineral exploitation is something like fifty years away, assuming the world then needs it and is willing to bear the cost. Before the 1959 treaty, seven countries—Britain, France, New Zealand, Australia, Chile, Argentina, and Norway—had staked out territorial claims. They all have since adhered to the treaty, along with other countries that have established scientific bases. The question of territory has hitherto been a minor one, mostly because such claims are theoretical, but they could easily become diplomatic footballs in the future. The present negotiations are intended to establish ground rules that could restrict the kind of pressure, including hostile competition, that Antarctica's vast resources could easily generate.

Bordeaux

High Livers

What do pineapple ice cream, cucumbers, and sunbathing have in common? They give the French liver trouble. What causes coughing fits, the staggers, and inability to read small type? Liver trouble. The *crise de foie*, or liver attack, is a famous function of French life. It was consecrated during the heyday of the spa as a sure sign of conspicuous consumption. But a French hepatology and gastroenterology expert, Dr. Claude Beraud of Bordeaux University, has declared this a myth in a four-hundred-page book entitled *The French and Their Livers*. He says that outside of genuine liver disease—principally cancer, hepatitis, and cirrhosis—liver ailments are very rare. He also says the French ought to stop all the strange and even dangerous diets they follow for imaginary liver complaints, and ignore the 140-odd commercial liver remedies that are consumed in large quantities but which have no clinical efficacy.



Uluschak, *Edmonton Journal*

Rothco

"I find nothing wrong with Trudeau traveling out of the country so much; it's his returning that bothers me!"